

Minutes of DAAC Meeting

Attendance

DAAC members present were: Joe Tringali, Vice-chair; Irene Barrelet, Clerk; Joan Rising; and Jim MacRostie.

Others present were Gerry Weiss, Select Board Representative; Nathaniel Malloy, DAAC staff liaison

Absent: Seren Derin, Chair; Dana Goddard; Reginald Andrade

Call to Order

Mr. Tringali called the meeting to order at 3:08 p.m.

Announcements

Mr. Tringali has been officially sworn in by the Town Clerk.

Minutes

Minutes from the March, 2009 meeting were reviewed and discussed. No corrections were found. Ms. Barrelet made a motion to accept the minutes; Mr. MacRostie seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous to accept the March minutes as submitted.

High School Auditorium

Mr. Malloy recounted his site visit and findings of the auditorium with Mr. Bohonowicz, Maintenance Director. The auditorium has a capacity of approximately 880, and according to the 1996 Architectural Access Board regulations for places of assembly, is required to provide 9 accessible seats. Mr. Malloy distributed a seating chart to the Committee which showed that the auditorium has fourteen accessible seats located in the front and back rows.

Ms. Barrelet commented that the seats were not distributed throughout the auditorium. The seats in the back seem to be too far away from the stage for the hard of hearing. According to the seating chart there does not appear to be group seating for those who would need to see an interpreter onstage. Ms. Barrelet believes the auditorium needs to make a provision to accommodate those who would need an interpreter, by designating group seats or seats within reasonable distance of the stage.

Mr. MacRostie reiterated Ms. Barrelet's comments that there were no seats in the middle of the auditorium. He said that according to the regulations, seats need to be distributed evenly throughout the place of assembly, and be of average quality.

Mr. Tringali quoted from the regulations (CMR 521) that seats need to be "proportionally" distributed, yet there are no accessible seats in the middle area of the auditorium.

Mr. MacRostie commented that during performances with an orchestra or band, the first three rows are occupied by the musicians and their equipment; this effectively reduces the number of accessible seats from 14 to 8, an unacceptable number according to the regulations.

Ms. Rising said that during the Valley Light Opera, it is common for the musicians to occupy the first few rows, reducing the number of accessible seats. However, the music is so loud that if the accessible seats were moved back from the front row just enough to be vacant during a musical, it would be too loud to sit in them—the back row is good during a musical event.

Mr. MacRostie also commented that the 3 accessible seats in the back row, center section, did not have adequate room to maneuver in and out if all three seats were occupied; the space is too narrow to get in and out.

Ms. Rising mentioned that most performances and shows at the auditorium are general admission, so it is a first come, first serve basis. She recommends that anyone who needs special accommodations call ahead to reserve seats or make requests with the high school. She also noted that the auditorium is actually a reasonable size, even if not apparent from the seating chart, so that every seat, even the last row, has good sight lines and great sound. She said there is not really a bad seat in the house.

Mr. Weiss responded that according to the regulations there still needs to be accessible seating distributed proportionally throughout the auditorium, which is not the current layout. He said that accessible seats in the center section midway down the aisles could have been built into the auditorium during the high school's extensive renovations in the late 1990's.

Mr. MacRostie said that the accessible seats in the four corners on the periphery should really be moved to the center section along the aisles. Folding chairs could be used for companion seating and if the accessible seating is not occupied during a performance, more folding chairs could be located to fill the space.

Ms. Rising expressed concern that if all the accessible seats were congregated in the middle on one aisle, it may be difficult to maneuver down the aisle as traffic would be congested. She noted that the back row seats are easy to use and provide great sight lines; she prefers the back row seats as a location for accessible seating.

Mr. Tringali suggested that a number of accessible seats from the front row be moved to the middle section along the aisles, thus satisfying the CMR 521. Moving the seats back would also alleviate the problems of seats being occupied by the orchestra.

Mr. MacRostie referenced Bowker Auditorium as a good example of a recent renovation to an assembly hall.

Mr. Rising asked how high school students who need accessible seating are accommodated in auditorium.

Mr. MacRostie recommended that if any changes be made to auditorium seating, the Disability Access Advisory Committee review the plans before construction.

Ms. Barrelet asked whether the high school has a designated area where people hard of hearing could use a listening device (handed out at each show or a personal device) or view a screen with closed captioning.

Mr. MacRostie made a motion to have plans drafted that show proposed seating in the middle of the auditorium in the center section along the aisles. The motion was not seconded.

Ms. Barrelet made a motion to request [to the high school] that the accessible seats in the front row be moved back enough so that they are not occupied by the orchestra, that at least three seats be moved to the middle of the auditorium along the center aisles, and that the accessible seats in the back remain unaltered.

Mr. MacRostie seconded this motion.

The vote was unanimous, 4-0, in support of the motion.

Emergency Contact Information

Mr. Malloy explained that he and Ms. Barrelet met with Kris Pacunas, Director of the Information Technologies Department, to discuss the ability of the Town to reach all citizens in case of an emergency. Mr. Pacunas was confident that if Amherst were to obtain the number of personal and hand held devices for individuals that are hard of hearing or visually impaired, they could be contacted during an emergency. He agreed to develop a contact information form that would be publicized online, in the newspaper—by any necessary media to reach those who cannot use the conventional reverse 911.

Ms. Barrelet provided a sample form to give to Mr. Pacunas, used by other communities to gather emergency contact information for citizens with disabilities.

Ms. Barrelet said that any hand held device can be used to dial 911 to reach the police.

Mr. Tringali asked about those who are in denial about hearing loss or other disability and may be unwilling to register with this service.

Ms. Barrelet responded that phones now have voice amplification.

Mr. Tringali suggested that the Bulletin or a local newspaper write a story about emergency contact.

Ms. Rising recommended that ‘Hampshire Life’ could write an exposé featuring the Disability Access Advisory Committee, and that emergency contact information for citizens with disabilities could be a part of this article.

Ms. Barrelet noted that other communities need to learn the options and alternatives for contacting those with disabilities, and thought that a press release is a great way to publicize the message.

Mr. Tringali asked how Town Hall could be contacted in a non-emergency and if this would involve using TTY .

Ms. Barrelet explained that TTY is essentially obsolete; as people more frequently use videophones with an interpreter, instant messaging on their computer, or a relay service to call any number. The deaf would contact Town Hall through an interpreter as staff may not sign.

Private Parking Lots

Mr. Malloy explained that Mr. Kent, Captain of Administration with the Amherst Police, had forwarded a parking agreement from 1997 which listed a number of businesses in the Town Center that allowed Police onto their property to enforce HP parking violations. The list, however, has not been updated to reflect change in ownership or management and has not been distributed to the public or shop owners.

Mr. Tringali said he would like to bring the issue of enforcing HP parking violations on private property to Town Meeting to enact a town-wide enforcement policy rather than voluntary agreements from individual property owners.

Mr. Weiss explained that Town Counsel could help draft the warrant language and provide legal and technical support for this regulation. If the regulation were to be adopted, it would make it compulsory that businesses provide parking with enforcement by the Town. Although the Chamber of Commerce may be willing to work with local businesses to sign an agreement letter, it would be hours of work and diligence, and would place the onus of enforcement on the property owner, while a town bylaw would relieve the owner from enforcement; the town would enforce HP parking.

Ms. Rising asked who enforces the parking regulations currently. She believes that parking enforcement (through a town-wide regulation) would benefit businesses.

Amherst Train Station

Mr. Tringali noted that even if the platform is made to be accessible, the parking lot is unsafe for anyone that may be unstable and it is treacherous in wet weather because it is dirt and gravel. He said the potholes make it dangerous to navigate.

Ms. Rising questioned whether the Train Station could be used as a focal point during the Town's 250th Anniversary, and if perhaps this publicity would help renovate and beautify the property. She mentioned this in light of speculation that Amtrak may be reinstating the train from Amherst to Montreal with Federal stimulus money.

Jones Library Parking

Mr. Tringali said he would like to make an appointment with Ms. Isman, Library Director, to measure the HP Parking spaces and determine a solution if they are not the correct size. He noted that the DAAC has received complaints about the size of the unloading area of the first HP parking space on the right as one enters, and that there are two courses of action:

1. DAAC recommends to the Library that they fix the parking, or
2. DAAC informs the Architectural Access Board of a violation and pursues a resolution through this third party mitigation.

Other

Mr. MacRostie noted that the sidewalk on the northwest corner of the intersection of Triangle Street and East Pleasant Street is quite steep as it descends to the crosswalks. He said that with the intended improvements to Kendrick Park there may be more pedestrian traffic in the downtown, and the steep section of sidewalk may be dangerous to many people. He questioned if the sidewalk repairs on East Pleasant Street adjacent to the park could extend to this steep area, with the installation of a handrail and less steep ramp.

Mr. Tringali said that the DAAC would need to be involved with improvements for Kendrick Park. He questioned whether the Town could, and should, install handrails on steep sections of sidewalk. He said that given the topography of Amherst, it would be impractical to install handrails on all steep sidewalks.

Ms. Barrelet asked who would pay for an interpreter if a deaf person were to join the DAAC.

Next Meeting

May 5, 2009 @ 3:00 pm.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Nathaniel Malloy, staff liaison